PATENT

TITLE OF INVENTION

EARTHEN RETAINING WALL HAVING FLAT SOIL REINFORCING MATS WHICH MAY BE VARIABLY SPACED

Background of the Invention

The present invention relates to a soil reinforced retaining wall for earthen formations and, in particular, is directed to such a wall wherein the soil reinforcing mats are of a planar configuration and successively placed in the formation at vertically spaced intervals, and separate face mats are secured to the soil reinforcing mats at the face of the formation. It is especially concerned with such an arrangement wherein the lift (i.e. the distance between successive soil reinforcing mats) may be increased as compared to walls presently in use. It is also concerned with a new face mat construction comprised of paired separate face mat elements secured one above the other in edge-to-edge relationship and an improved construction for anchoring such elements in vertical alignment. The invention also provides an improved construction which accommodates settlement of an earthen retaining wall having a wire face, without bowing of the face.

A soil reinforced retaining wall designed to accommodate an increased lift between soil reinforcing mats may be seen in U.S. patent 5,722,799 to William K. Hilfiker, one of the inventors herein. The face mat shown in Fig. 9 of that patent is similar to the face mats of the present invention. As contrasted to the present invention, however, the wire wall of that patent employs angle-shaped soil reinforcing mats with portions which extend over wire face mats, and increasing the lift requires a specially constructed unitary face mat which extends over the height of the lift. The wall of the present invention, in contrast, employs

planar soil reinforcing mats and face panel mats which may comprise separate paired elements secured together in edge-to-edge relationship, with anchors to stabilize the elements and secure them in vertical alignment.

Prior art arrangements employing generally planar soil reinforcing mats may be seen in U.S. patents 4,329,089 and 5,622,455. The walls of these patents employ special connectors between the soil reinforcing mats and face elements, and do not have separate paired face panel elements of the type used in the present invention, or the provision of anchors to secure these elements in vertical alignment.

A prior art wire wall construction provided with compressible face elements to accommodate settling of an earthen formation, without bowing of the face elements, may be seen in U.S. patent 6,357,970. As contrasted to the present invention, however, the wall of this patent employs L-shaped soil reinforcing mats having vertically extending elements which extend over the face of the wall.

Summary of the Invention

The present invention provides a structure for retaining and reinforcing an earthen formation by means of planar soil reinforcing mats which are embedded in the formation at vertically spaced intervals and welded wire face mats which are disposed at the face of the formation between the successive soil reinforcing mats. The face mats are held in place by being engaged behind transversely extending elements of the soil reinforcing mats. The face mats can either be unitary, or comprised paired separate face mat elements secured one above the other in edge-to-edge relationship. Where the face mats are comprised of such paired separate face mat elements, stabilizing

anchors are embedded in the formation intermediate the successive soil reinforcing mats and secured to the face mats to maintain the paired face mat elements in vertical alignment.

In the method of the invention, the planar soil reinforcing mats are successively placed at the face of the formation in vertically spaced relationship, starting at the bottom and working up, with each soil reinforcing mat having a separate face mat secured thereto and extending upwardly therefrom. Backfill is placed over each successive soil reinforcing mat and compacted into place against the face mat extending upwardly therefrom. Each successive soil reinforcing mat is engaged with the face mat therebeneath to secure the face mat against outward displacement.

The apparatus and method accommodates settlement of the earthen formation, without bowing of the face panels, through means of compressible members which support the soil reinforcing mats on the face mats, and/or frangible supports which space the respective face panels from the soil reinforcing mats therebeneath.

A principal object of the invention is to provide an apparatus and method for the fabrication of soil reinforced earthen retaining walls wherein the soil reinforcing members comprise planar mats and the face members comprise welded wire mats separate from the soil reinforcing mats, which are secured behind transverse wires of the reinforcing mats.

Another object of the invention is to provide such a method and apparatus wherein the face mats comprise paired separate elements secured one above the other in edge-to-edge relationship to increase the depth of the lift between successive soil reinforcing mats.

Another object related to the later object is to provide such a method and apparatus wherein soil may be backfilled and compacted into place behind the lower of such paired face mat elements before it is backfilled and compacted into place above the upper of such elements.

Still another object is to provide a means to anchor such paired face elements to the earthen formation so as to maintain the elements in vertical alignment.

A further and more general object of the invention is to provide an apparatus and method for constructing a soil reinforced earthen retaining wall through means of flat welded wire mats which may be economically manufactured and easily transported.

Still another and more specific object of the invention is to provide an apparatus and method for constructing an earthen retaining wall wherein separate flat soil reinforcing mats and face mat elements are secured together without the requirement of specially manufactured connectors.

A further object of the invention is to provide an apparatus and method for retaining an earthen formation wherein soil reinforcement is provided by a flat welded wire mat embedded within the formation and a face is provided by a separate welded wire face mat engaged behind a transversely extending wire of the soil reinforcing mat.

Another object related to the later object is to provide such an apparatus and method wherein welded wire face mats engaged behind the transverse wires of the soil reinforcing mats are secured to one

another by interdigitating overlapping fingers extending from the face mats.

These and other objects will become more apparent when viewed in light of the following detailed description and accompanying drawings.

Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a perspective view of a unitary face mat of the present invention;

Fig. 2 is a perspective view of the soil reinforcing mat of the invention;

Fig. 3 is a perspective view, with soil removed for purposes of illustration, illustrating how a lowermost and next successive soil reinforcing mat would be placed in constructing a retaining wall according to the present invention, with unitary face mats shown in place;

Fig. 4 is an enlarged perspective view illustrating a pair of face mat elements of the present invention engaged with one another and held in place by a soil reinforcing mat, as they would appear prior to movement of the upper face mat shown therein to its fully erected vertical disposition;

Fig. 5 is a perspective view corresponding to that of the Fig. 4, illustrating the upper face mat therein after it has moved to the fully erected vertical disposition;

Fig. 6 is a perspective view of a temporary retaining wall constructed according to a first embodiment of the present invention;

Fig. 7 is a cross-sectional elevational view of the temporary retaining wall of Fig. 6, shown with the first lift in place and the second lift about to be placed;

Fig. 8 is a perspective view of a permanent retaining wall constructed according to the present invention;

Fig. 9 is a cross-sectional elevational view of the permanent wall of Fig. 8;

Fig. 10 is a perspective view of the compressible support member of the invention, as it would appear in place on a wire shown in phantom;

Fig. 11 is a perspective view of the frangible spacer of the invention, as it would appear engaged between two wires, shown in phantom; and

Fig. 12 is a perspective view, with parts thereof broken away, showing the frangible spacer of Fig. 11 engaged between a soil reinforcing mat and the face mat thereabove.

Description of the Preferred Embodiments

Fig. 1 shows a face mat, designated FM, of the type which may be used in present invention. This mat is of a welded wire construction and comprises vertically extending wires 10 spaced from another by approximately two inches and horizontally extending wires 14, 16, 18,

20 and 22 extending transversely across and welded to the vertically extending wires. Typically, the wire size of the face mat is W3.5 to W12. While the proportions of the face mat FM may vary, in one exemplary embodiment designed for use in temporary walls, where a single face mat element spans the full lift between successive soil reinforcing mat, the face mat has a width of six feet and the height of two feet, measured between the uppermore and lowermost transversely extending wires 14 and 22, respectively. The face mat for a permanent wall embodiment of the invention may be comprised of paired face mat elements secured one above the other and edge-to-edge relationship. The respective elements of such a mat would typically have a width of six feet and a height of one and a half feet, as measured between the uppermost and lowermost transverse wires 14 and 22. In these exemplary embodiments, the wires 14 and 16 would typically be spaced by approximately three inches, as would wires 20 and 22. The transversely extending wire 18 is positioned approximately midway between the wires 16 and 20.

The vertically extending wires 10 extend distally beyond the uppermost and lowermost transversely extending wires 14 and 22, respectively, to provide fingers F inclined backwardly relative to the mat at an angle of from five to 10 degrees from vertical. In a typical embodiment, these fingers have a length of approximately four inches. The finger length may be extended to accommodate vertical compression of a wall which results from settling of the retained formations.

The welded wire soil reinforcing mat of Fig. 2, designated SM, comprises longitudinal wires 24 typically spaced from one another by from 6 to 12 inches and transversely extending wires 26 welded to and extending across the longitudinal wires at spaced intervals, typically in

the range of 12 to 24 inches. While the width of the mats SM may vary, a typical width dimension is three and a half feet. The length of the mats SM will vary, depending upon soil conditions and the size of the wall being constructed. The longitudinal wires 24 are typically constructed of W4.5 to W14 wire and the transverse wires 26 are typically constructed of W4.0 to W4.5 wire. The soil reinforcing mats SM are of a planar (meaning flat) configuration. Each soil reinforcing mat terminates at a transversely extending wire 26A at one end thereof. In an assembled wall, the wire 26A extends across the face of a soil formation being reinforced and the fingers F of the face mats FM extend behind the wires 26A.

Fig. 3 diagrammatically illustrates how the components are assembled to create the first lift of a soil reinforced wall. As there pictured, however, no soil is shown in place, in order that the construction and inter-relationship of the wire elements may be better observed. The components comprise a face mat FM, soil reinforcing mats SM, stiffener mats ST and modified lower face mats FM_L. The modified face mat FM_L corresponds to the face mats FM, except that the lower fingers, designated F_L are bent outwardly at 90° to the vertical wires 10 and that a pair of horizontal transversely extending intermediate wires 18 are provided. The wire size and proportions of the mats FM_L correspond generally to that of the mats FM. In the mat FM_L, the paired wires 18 are spaced from another by approximately four to five inches and generally centered intermediate to the wires 16 and 20.

The soil reinforcing and retaining elements are assembled into the configuration shown in Fig. 3 by the following sequence of steps:

1. lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM is placed horizontally on the soil at the foot of the formation;

2. modified soil reinforcing mat FM_L is placed above the lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM so that fingers FL hook beneath the outermost transverse wire 26A of the lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM;

3. stiffener mats ST are secured between the lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM and the face mat FM_L through means of hog rings 28 and hooked ends 30 which engage over one of the wires 26 of the mat SM and the wire 14 of the mat FM_2 (see Fig. 7);

4. after placing a filter mat (not illustrated in Fig. 3) behind the face mat FM_L, soil is backfilled and compacted over the lowermost soil mat SM and against the mat FM_L to the level of the uppermost transversely extending wire 14 of the mat FM_L;

5. next successive soil reinforcing mat SM is placed on the backfill, with its outermost transversely extending wire 26A extending across the face of the formation and in front of the fingers F of the mat FM_L;

6. next successive face mat FM is placed above the upper mat SM as shown in Fig. 3 so that the fingers F at the top of the face mat FM_L and the bottom of the face mat FM are both disposed behind the uppermost transversely extending wire 26A of the upper mat SM, with the fingers interdigitating and extending over into the front of the respective wires 14, 16, 20 and 22 (when initially placed in the later condition, the fingers will incline the mat FM backwardly toward the soil formation being reinforced, as shown in Fig. 4); and

7. a filter mat is placed behind the face mat FM and soil is then backfilled over the upper mat SM shown in Fig. 3 and

compacted into place to force the mat FM to the vertical position shown in Fig. 5.

Fig. 4 is an enlarged perspective view of the joinder between the face mats FM and FM_L and the intermediate soil reinforcing mat SM therebetween. As there shown, the mat FM is inclined backwardly toward the earthen formation (not shown) being reinforced as the result of the inclination of the fingers F of the respective face mats FM and FM_L and their engagement over the wires 14, 16, 20 and 22. From this figure, it will also be seen that the fingers F extend behind the transversely extending wire 26A of the intermediate soil reinforcing mat SM and that, thus, the reinforcing mat serves to secure the face mats FM and FM_L against outward displacement relative to the earthen formation.

Fig. 4 also shows how the intermediate soil reinforcing mat SM is supported on the uppermost transversely extending wire 14 of the face mat FM_L through means of compressible support members 34 of a toroidal configuration. The members 34, as may be seen in enlarged detail in Fig. 10, are received around the fingers F of the lower face mat FM_L so as to be sandwiched between the transversely extending wire 14 of the mat and certain of the longitudinally extending wires 24 of the soil reinforcing mat SM. The support members are fabricated of a crushable material, such as STYROFOAM. Their purpose is to crush in response to settling of the soil reinforcing mat SM as the earthen formation settles, to thus permit the soil reinforcing mat to move downwardly, without bowing of the face mat FM_L upon which the soil reinforcing mat is supported. The support members 34 may be of any desired dimension to allow for such settlement, for example a depth of an inch or more. To accommodate a larger degree of such settlement, without bowing of the lower face mat, the fingers F may be extended

and the compressible members 34 may be of an increased depth. As shown, the members 34 are on each fourth vertically extending wire of the mat FM_L. The number and spacing of the compressible members are chosen so that the members provide adequate support and do not prematurely crush.

The stiffener mat ST has been omitted from Fig. 4 for the purposes of simplification of the illustration. It should be appreciated that the hooked ends 28 of the mat ST would be engaged over the transversely extending wire 14 of the face mat FM_L and secured in place by the hog rings 30 (see Fig. 7). Successive face mats above the face mat FM shown in Figs. 3 and 4 do not require stiffener mats to hold the face mats as backfill soil is placed, since the fingers F perform this function. Accordingly, for these successive mats, the intersection between the face mats and soil reinforcing mat is as shown in Fig. 4, without the presence of stiffener mats ST.

Fig. 5 corresponds to Fig. 4, except that the upper face mat FM shown therein is in vertical alignment with the lower face mat FM_L. This occurs as the result of the upper mat being forced outwardly by backfilling and compacting soil (not illustrated) therebehind. In viewing Figs. 4 and 5, it should also be appreciated that the filter mats 36 which would be behind the face mats FM_L and FM are not shown. Such mats would actually be behind the face mats (see Fig. 6) so that soil backfilled and compacted into place bears against the face mats and does not slough away. The presence of such filter mats enables the backfilling and compaction of soil behind the mat FM to force the mat to a vertical condition, as shown in Fig. 5. Compaction is adequate when such vertical orientation is achieved. As the face FM moves to vertical, the fingers F of the face mats FM and FM_L are forced outwardly by the transversely extending wires over which they engage to the condition

shown in Fig. 5 wherein the fingers are moved to an essentially vertical orientation.

The Temporary Retaining Wall Embodiment

This embodiment is shown in Figs. 6 and 7 and, for purposes of illustration, is illustrated as having three successive lifts L_1, L_2 and L_3, respectively. Although only three such lifts are shown, a wall would typically have many more intermediate lifts corresponding to the lift L_2.

The wall shown in Figs. 6 and 7 is "temporary" in the sense that it is intended to have a life of only a few years and does not have the corrosion resistance and sacrificial steel of permanent long life walls. The wires of the mat elements of the temporary wall are generally not zinc coated and are of a size smaller than would typically be employed in a permanent wall. For example, the longitudinal wires 24 of the soil reinforcing mats SM of the temporary wall would typically have a wire size of from W4.5 to W9.5, as contrasted to the size range of W9.5 to W14.0 for a permanent wall.

The lifts L_1, L_2 and L_3 of the temporary wall typically have a depth of two feet and each of the soil reinforcing mats SM provides a soil reinforcing function for the lifts to either side thereof.

As shown in Fig. 6, filter mats 36 are in place behind the face mats FM. These filter mats are of conventional construction and serve to retain the soil therebehind against sloughing through the face mats, while permitting water to pass therethrough. They also serve, as described in the foregoing, to enable the backfill soil which is compacted into place to impart force to the face mats.

The first two lifts L_1, and L_2 of Fig. 6 are constructed in the manner which has been described with respect to Fig. 3.

Fig. 7 is an enlarged cross-section of the soil reinforced retaining wall of Fig. 6, shown with backfill E in place in the first lift, except for that portion at the upper front end of the lift. This is the condition the lift would assume initially upon placement and compaction of the backfill, prior to placement of the soil reinforcing mat SM on top of the backfill of the lift L_1. As there shown, the stiffener mat ST comprised of longitudinal wires 38 with transverse wires 40 welded there across, is engaged between the lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM and the face mat FM_L. The hooked ends 28 of the stiffener mat engage over transverse wires of the mat SM and FM_L to maintain the mat FM_L in vertical orientation, as the backfill is placed and compacted. The second lift face mat FM in Fig. 7 is shown inclined backwardly toward the formation in the condition it assumes prior to backfilling and compaction of the second lift.

As shown in Fig. 6, the third, and topmost lift L_3 has a modified face mat FM_U of a construction corresponding to that of the mat FM_L, except that it is inverted so that the fingers F extend downwardly into interdigitating relationship with the face mat FM therebelow and the fingers FL extend outwardly from the top of the mat. The outwardly extending fingers are hooked behind the transversely extending wire 26A of a topmost soil reinforcing mat SM placed on the top of the backfill of lift L_3.

In the course of constructing lift L_3, the face mat FM_U is initially inclined rearwardly, similarly to the face mat FM shown in Fig. 7. As soil is backfilled and compacted into lift L_3, the mat FMU is forced to the vertical condition. The topmost soil reinforcing mat SM is then placed.

Some backfill is also placed over the topmost soil reinforcing mat SM to hold it in place.

The components of the modified face mat FM_U are identical to those of the face mat FM_L and are designated by like numerals and letters. Because of this, the transverse wires 14 and 16 of the mat FM_U are at the bottom of the mat and the transverse wires 20 and 22 are at the top of the mat.

Permanent Retaining Wall Embodiment

This embodiment differs from the temporary retaining wall embodiment primarily in that the face mat for each successive lift is comprised of a pair of face mat elements secured one above the other in edge-to-edge relationship, with an intermediate stabilizing anchor mat embedded in the formation to hold face mat elements in vertical alignment. The construction of each respective face mat element is essentially the same as the face mats of the temporary retaining wall embodiment, except that the face mat elements of the permanent wall are of a lesser height. (For example, each of the face mat elements of the permanent wall may have a height of one and a half feet.) Thus, the permanent wall embodiment readily accommodates increased height lifts, such as the three foot lifts now allowed for MSE walls by ASHTO (American Society of Highway Transportation Officials). Fabricating a three foot lift with a face mat comprised of one and a half foot face elements secured one above the other and edge-to-edge relationship has the advantage that the backfill soil behind each one and a half foot face element may be backfilled and compacted before the placement of the next element. Thus, good and uniform backfill and compaction can be achieved, even though the lift is three feet high.

The face mat of the permanent retaining wall embodiment is designated in its entirety by the character FP, as may be seen in Fig. 9. As there shown, the first lift, designated LP_1 is faced by face panel elements FP_1 and FP_2 secured in edge-to-edge relationship. Except for its reduced height (one and a half feet as contrasted to two feet), the face mat element FP_1 corresponds in construction to the modified lower face mat FM_L. Similarly, the face mat FP_2, except for its height, corresponds to the face mat FM. The parts of the face mat elements FP_1 and FP_2 corresponding to those of the face mats FM and FM_L are designated by like numerals, followed by the subscript P, as follows:

Fingers F_P
Fingers FL_P
Vertical Wires 10_P
Horizontal Wires 14_P
Horizontal Wires 16_P
Horizontal Wires 18_P
Horizontal Wires 20_P
Horizontal Wires 22_P

The soil reinforcing mats of the permanent wall embodiment are of the same construction as that of the temporary retaining wall embodiment, except that they are made of heavier wire to increase their strength and the amount of sacrificial steel available, and that they are zinc coated for corrosion resistance. Accordingly, these mats are also designated SM, with the longitudinal wires thereof designated 24 and the transverse wires designated 26 and 26A. In a typical embodiment of the permanent wall, the longitudinal wires have a size of W9.5 to W14 and the transverse wires have a size of W4.0 to 4.5.

The lowermost face panel element FP_1 is initially supported by a stiffener mat ST corresponding to that of the temporary retaining wall embodiment. As seen in Fig. 9, the components of this mat are designated by the same numbers used for the stiffener mat of the temporary retaining wall embodiment. Like the temporary wall embodiment, the stiffener mats are held in place by hog rings 30.

The permanent wall embodiment has as an additional element an intermediate anchor mat AM. The anchor mat AM is of a construction similar to the soil reinforcing mats SM, except that it is much shorter (generally half or less the length of the mats SM). The elements of the anchor mats AM are designated by numerals corresponding to those of the soil reinforcing mats SM, followed by the subscript P, as follows:

Longitudinal wires 24_P
Transversely extending wires 26_P
Transversely extending wires $26A_P$

The permanent wall is erected by a sequence essentially the same as the temporary wall, except that each lift between successive soil reinforcing mats SM is backfilled and compacted in two stages. The first stage being up to the level of the anchor mat AM and the second stage being up to the level of the next successive soil reinforcing mat SM. During the course of such construction, the lowermost soil reinforcing mat SM is first placed at the bottom of the formation and the first face mat element FP_1 is secured thereto so that the fingers FL_P engage behind the transversely extending wire 26_A of the lowermost mat SM and the upper end of the element FP_1 is secured in place through the stiffener mat ST. Soil is then backfilled and compacted to the level of the uppermost transversely extending wire 14_P of the face panel element FP_1. Then the anchor mat AM is placed on the backfill

soil so the wire $26A_P$ is engaged to the outside of the fingers FP of the mat element FP_1. These fingers are inclined rearwardly, as with the fingers of the temporary retaining wall embodiment. The next face panel element FP_2 is then also engaged behind the wire $26A_P$ of the mat AM so that its lower most fingers FP extend in interdigitating relationship with the upwardly extending fingers of the mat element FP_1, with the fingers of the respective elements extending over and to the outside of the transversely extending wires 14_P, 16_P, 20_P and 22_P. As so disposed, the face panel element FP_2 will initially assume a condition inclined backwardly toward the earthen formation, as does the mat FM shown in Fig. 7. After the element FP_2 is so placed, soil is backfilled and compacted behind the element and over the anchor mat AM, thus forcing the face panel element FP_2 to the vertical condition seen in Fig. 9. Filter mats 36, as shown in Fig. 9, retain the backfilled and compacted soil and function in a diaphragm-like way to transmit pressure to the face panel elements.

While Figs. 8 and 9 illustrate only a lower lift LP_1 and the beginning of the next successive lift LP_2, it should be appreciated that a fully constructed wall would embody multiple successive such lifts, one above the other, with each successive lift having paired face mat elements secured one above the other in edge-to-edge relationship and anchored by an anchor mat AM, as shown in Fig. 9. The paired face mat elements of the successive mats between the lowermost lift LP_1 and the uppermost lift (not illustrated) would each be comprised of a pair of face panel elements corresponding to the elements FP_2 wherein backwardly inclined fingers extend from both the upper and lower edges of the panel elements. Initially, each panel element would be backwardly inclined. Upon backfilling and compaction of soil to the upper level of the element, the element would move to vertical. The topmost face panel element of the permanent wall would be of a

construction corresponding to that of the element FP_1, but inverted so that the outwardly extending fingers FL_P are at the top and extend outwardly. These fingers would hook around the outermost transversely extending wire 26A of a topmost soil reinforcing mat SM, similarly to what is shown for the topmost mat SM of the temporary wall shown in Fig. 6.

Frangible Face Mat Support

Figs. 11 and 12 show a frangible spacer 42 engaged between the lowermost transverse wire 22 of a face mat element FM and the transverse wire 26A of the soil reinforcing mat SM immediately therebelow, to hold the face in elevated condition relative to the soil reinforcing mat. The spacer comprises a body having bifurcated ends 44 and 46 proportioned to snap into engagement around the transverse wires and a web portion 48 disposed between the bifurcated portions to maintain the wires received within the bifurcated portions in spaced relationship.

The spacer 42 may be fabricated of any suitable material, such as extruded aluminum or a polymer, and is of such strength that the web portion 48 will fracture to release the wires 22 and 26A for movement toward one another in the event the face mat supported on the spacer is overloaded as the result of settling of the earthen formation. Fracturing of the web 42 permits the wires 22 and 26A to move toward one another to accommodate such overloading, without bowing of the face panel.

In an assembled wall, a multiplicity of spacers 42 would be provided between adjacent transversely extending wires 22 and 26A, at spaced intervals. The spacers 42 could be used as an alternative to the

compressible support members at the top of the face mats, or as an addition thereto; the purpose of both the compressible support members 34 and the frangible spaces 42 being to permit successive soil reinforcing mats to move toward one another in response to settling of the retained earthen formation, without bowing of the face mats.

Conclusion

From the foregoing description, it is believed apparent that the present invention enables the attainment of the objects initially set forth herein. In particular, it provides a soil reinforced earthen retaining wall wherein the soil reinforcing mats and face mats are of a simplified flat construction and so constructed and assembled that increased lift height may be accommodated with uniform backfilling and compaction. It should be understood, however, that the invention is not limited to the specifics of the described embodiments, but rather is defined by the accompanying claims.